"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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Preserving Rural Values

By D. E. Lindstrom*

The question has often been raised, "Are there values in rural life sufficiently distinctive that efforts should be made to preserve them, and, if so, for what purposes should these efforts be made?" In looking at this question, one naturally asks, "What are distinctive rural values?" Then, "Which of these distinctive rural values are in jeopardy?" Finally, "What rural values should be preserved?" Students of rural life are pretty well agreed that there are distinctive rural values. The values selected for discussion here are the values growing out of primary association, innate inventiveness, preservative attitudes and self-determination.

With the rapid urbanization of rural life in America, values growing out of primary association seem to have less and less meaning. They can be considered, however, from at least two points of view: first, from the standpoint of the occupation--farming is both productive and creative--and second, from the standpoint of the people and their associations--farming always has encouraged family and neighborhood cooperation.

Since farmers live close to the soil, they cannot help being aware of the many imponderable processes of nature that take place in and upon the soil. One of the greatest delights in farm life is watching things grow, caring for them, and seeing them ripen into good harvests. This is a real value. The reverse is most disheartening, but the phenomenal thing is that even in the seemingly most hopeless situation, as in the dust bowl, hope has sprung anew at the coming of every new harvest season. It seems now that that hope is bearing fruit, for the plains areas are this year again producing good harvests.

The love of the land is another value, more revered in other countries than in ours because our system of land operation has resulted in extensive soil erosion in so many areas. Love of land is, nevertheless, a real value and one to be recognized. Living so close to nature, land, and to creative processes, the good farmer is a worker, and work becomes second nature to the farmer. The care of crops in season and of stock in times of adverse weather has led the farmer to take little note of long hours and to concentrate on getting the job done. Learning the meaning of work is a distinctive rural value; youth in rural areas who get the habit and experience of work have a distinct advantage over their city cousins.

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Primary association may also be related to relations with one's fellows. Mutual association is a natural result of life in rural areas. In pioneer days, this neighborhood cooperation was for protection against wild beasts, enemies, inclement weather, and for self-help. Many of us remember our days on the farm when we used to borrow from our neighbors, and our neighbors borrowed from us; when we used to exchange work in hay fields during harvest and other times. More recently, mutual associations have developed along cooperative lines to improve farmers' economic status. Today there are more producer cooperatives in the United States than in any other country of the world. These started with local groups of neighbors who trusted each other and who felt that by working together they could accomplish the marketing of livestock, grain, and the purchasing of supplies with greater economy to themselves. Recent developments have tended to spread these cooperative efforts over larger areas, into county and regional associations, in order to obtain greater efficiency in operation through larger volume. In many cases, the personal, neighborhood contact has all but become entirely sacrificed, and cooperation has too often become a cold, impersonal business relationship.

Mutual association has also provided for individual and group advancement. Grange halls, one-room schools, husking bees, harvest festivals, music and drama festivals, sports festivals, community meetings, community and county rural choruses, play tournaments, community and county agricultural fairs, farmers' institutes--these are evidences of mutual association for individual and group advancement. With the coming of the Extension Service, this advancement has taken the form of demonstrations on individual farms for the benefit of self and neighbors. Tours, project meetings, community gatherings, and numerous specialized activities bring the results of experiment stations and colleges of agriculture to the people in the rural communities.

Rural people have always had a certain amount of innate inventiveness because they have been faced with so many unpredictable changes. It is significant in this connection that we read that civilization and agriculture are identical, both in time of appearance and in essential nature. Being inventive and creative, farm people thus form the chief source for the growth of urban culture. Food surpluses are essential to city growth, and land has become more productive because farmers, through their organizations and agencies, have constantly sought new ways of improving soil fertility and crop varieties. Cities grow through exploitation of natural resources; the time is rapidly approaching when city, as well as rural, people must develop effective means of recreating the surpluses which have been exploited or of conserving those which cannot be recreated--the products of the soil, the forests and the mines. Thus the creativeness and inventiveness of rural people may indeed be considered rural values.

The third type of distinctive rural values grows out of what is here classified under the term "preservative attitudes." Farmers have been characterized as individualists, for they think and act for themselves; thus, they have learned self-reliance. These certainly are distinctive values. Rural people tend to be conservative; they are slow to make changes, and though educators sometimes are irked at the slowness with which farm people do make changes, yet this has in many cases prevented changes which might have had disastrous results. With conservatism goes a sort of resignation--a feeling that if we cannot get it this year, we will work for it and perhaps it will come later.

Farmers who live close to nature also tend to have what might be called a magical mind. Volumes can be written on "the signs of the times" by which so many rural people have lived. Planting by the phase of the moon, predicting weather on the basis of sun dogs, rings around the moon, and many other methods are still current. The belief in the supernatural, therefore, is deeply ingrained in the rural mind; modern methods in agriculture, the application of science, sometimes destroys, sometimes reinforces these magical beliefs. One must recognize that mechanization, increased mobilization, improved communication, commercialization, scientific advancement, and government intervention in the lives of farm people are causing changes and that science in agriculture has tempered the "magical mind" and made it more reasonable.

Farmers learn from nature to make their own decisions, often necessarily made on the spur of the moment. They are used to depending on their own resources and to determining for themselves what course to follow. Thus, they learn to be thrifty and frugal. Mistakes are often costly, so they are conservative. Many of them are, with their conservativeness, somewhat suspicious; they have a tendency to distrust those things that are strange to

them. Meeting situations squarely makes them frank and sometimes blunt. The opportunity and the will to make one's own decisions--these are a natural part of rural life.

The values in rural life are carried into urban areas by rural people. Were it not for the movement of rural people to the urban areas, many towns and cities would decline in population. Thus, people in rural areas have a real impact upon the lives of people in urban areas; they bring to urban areas the wealth and culture they have gained from rural life and its institutions. City life, with its decreasing number of children, tends to lay more emphasis upon immediate economic advancement and less upon continuity of family life. City schools are individualistic; rural schools are still neighborhood institutions. City churches flourish largely by reason of the rural influx. Thus, these institutions--the home, the school and the church--should be recognized for their contributions to city life, as well as their effect on rural life.

The rural population, moreover, is a national balance wheel, with its primary associations, its innate inventiveness, and its preservative attitude. It is a reservoir of national patriotism and manpower; it is a preserver of natural cultural traits. These are values in rural life which are distinctive and which must be recognized as such.

Changes in rural and urban life have resulted in the destruction of many of the above rural values; others of them are in serious jeopardy. Those seeming to suffer most from recent changes are self-determination and primary association. With the loss of primary association goes the weakening of self-determination and the effectiveness of group life dependent on these things.

Self-determination is in jeopardy partly because of the loss of operator-ownership of land. Increased tenancy carries with it increased population and institutional instability. Where high percentages of tenancy and rapid movement from farm to farm are found, there is also found cultural decline, indifference to schooling, neglect of church, and a lack of a permanent stake in land. Tenants, moreover, cannot have the same feeling of independence that owner-operators, and especially debt-free owner-operators, have. Farm laborers are almost completely economically dependent on someone else; someone else makes decisions for them.

With landlord, tenant and labor classes growing farther and farther apart, and with the growth of instability of operators comes community decay. The owners of large tracts of land, especially those who live outside the community, have little interest in building up the institutions of that community. They wish to keep taxes down and, therefore, have not the interest in building up the tax-supported institutions. Being away from the community, they cannot have the interest in the church that those who live there have.

Farmers, even though they have struggled since the Civil War to maintain or increase their control of marketing and purchasing, still are far from establishing effective control. With less than 15 per cent of the farmers in general farm organizations and with these farm organizations divided as to policy, individual farmers have a sense of helplessness, and those who are tenants and are forced to move frequently from farm to farm have an increasing sense of insecurity. Where this situation exists, there is a lack of interest in basic rural institutions, a tendency for a decay in rural morality, an ineffectiveness of educational institutions, and a formalization of organizations.

Commercialization of agriculture and the improvement of communication have reduced neighborhood contacts in rural areas. Thus, the primary institutions of the family, the neighborhood, and the rural community have suffered in loss of leadership and in loss of membership participation in these activities. Mechanization, moreover, has developed a sort of self-sufficiency in a farm unit so that farmers are no longer as dependent upon their neighbors as they once were. The new forms of organization operating on a county and regional basis have tended to depersonalize contacts and place more responsibility in the hands of professional leaders. Neighborhoods and communities have been split up into special-interest groups, some of the groups operating in the same neighborhood or community being in direct conflict with each other. Some of the activities of agencies have tended to create a dependence on governmental forms. Those people on relief and WPA in rural areas hesitate to separate themselves from this governmental support because it has offered security and because the jobs open in the average rural community frequently do not offer the same degree of security. The farm home itself is changing, for farm fam-

ilies are getting smaller, especially on the good land. Family interests are being diversified by special-interest organizations. The farmer's interests are in his cooperative and farmers' organization; the homemaker's interests are concentrated in the home economics club; the boy goes to his 4-H Club; the girl, to her 4-H Club; and the older youth, to their county youth meetings. Thus comes a segmentation of family life not unlike that going on in the cities. City life itself is attractive, because the most apparent forms of city life are the attractive forms. Young people are aware of the attractions of city life, but they fail to see the unattractive aspects. It is only when youth from rural areas become disillusioned upon failure to get jobs in the city that a cross-section of city life becomes apparent to them.

Many other rural values are in jeopardy, but these--self-determination and a weakening of primary institutions--are probably in greatest jeopardy.

What values, then, should society endeavor to help rural people preserve? O. E. Baker has set forth a philosophy which should challenge the thinking of all of us. He places first the widespread ownership of property by operators by encouraging the youth who like the farm to begin early to build a nest egg, by encouraging fathers and mothers to take sons and daughters into partnership, and by reviving the custom of character loans. These character loans might well come through the church as well as through other institutions. Encourage home industries, especially in the areas lacking the economic advantages of the corn belt. Increase home income by home economies through good buying habits. Make homes attractive, modern and comfortable, which can be done on many farms at relatively little cost. Encourage debt reduction, especially in times of advancing prices. Develop among farm people a sense of home-loving values as contrasted with money and investment values, thus restraining farmers in times of increasing prices from buying too much land at too high prices. By developing neighborhood and community activities, keep satisfaction in farming and in rural life.

A second type of values which Baker would have us preserve is the voluntary institutions, primarily centered around the family ideal which includes a desire for the reproduction of the race, the education of the child, and the transferring of wealth from generation to generation. This includes as well a recognition of the divine in man, the importance of the worth of the human soul, including the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which is at the core of a democratic and, therefore, the Christian way of life. This does not mean over-emphasis upon individual rights; it means as well the development of a true loyalty to the state, a state which is of, for, and by the people. The knowledge of how to work is of such importance in these days when so many youth are growing up with so little knowledge of the meaning of work that emphasis must be placed upon the dignity of labor. And, when much emphasis is being placed upon immediate material accumulation, emphasis should also be placed upon the realization of the necessity of sacrifice. This becomes increasingly important as we approach the time when sacrifices must be made for national defense.

To the above attempt at summarization of Baker's philosophy should probably be added the importance of creating in rural life a modern agrarian philosophy. This means developing among farm people not only the knowledge and willingness of how to produce and market efficiently, but also the knowledge and willingness to use as much of that production in the home as possible, placing increasing emphasis on the farm and the home as a consuming center, not only from the standpoint of consuming material goods produced by the farm, but also of non-material goods. The farm home can be a consuming center for music, drama, art and literature. At once and at the same time, it can become the center for the creation of culture: good music, literature, drama, discussion of the current issues, and the development of a more effective community life. To become all of this, the farm home must be the farmer's own; the family, as a unit, must produce and consume together, be a unit in the development of school, church and community life, and be assured of its right to maintain itself on the land from generation to generation. Thus, the most distinctive rural values can be nurtured not only for rural life but for urban life as well--the love and preservation of land, man and the Christian way of life.

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